

Student Dependency Status

Objectives

- Describe what makes a student independent for federal student aid purposes.
- Review what happens on the FAFSA when a student does not have access to parental information.
- Explain which parent's information a dependent applicant should provide on the FAFSA.

Materials

- PowerPoint Presentation
- *Free Application for Federal Student Aid*
- "Am I Dependent or Independent?" fact sheet
- "Who Is My 'Parent' When I Fill Out the FAFSA?" fact sheet

Trainer Tips

This module consists of two sections: an informational lecture about the FAFSA dependency status questions, and a series of case studies that encourage participation. Some things to keep in mind:

- Despite the fact that the foster care, legal guardianship, emancipated minor, and homelessness questions have been on the FAFSA for a couple of years, some of your participants are probably unfamiliar with the questions. For that reason, it's important to highlight them and ensure participants understand them.
- The case studies in the section about whose information to report in the Parent sections of the FAFSA will be sure to generate additional examples from participants. Encourage them to answer each others' questions as these examples are raised.
- Throughout this document, we use the abbreviation "FAA" to mean "financial aid administrator."

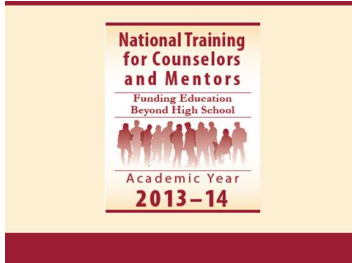
Read more about dependency status, special circumstances, who is a parent, and dependency overrides at the following places:

- *FAFSA on the Web* (www.fafsa.gov)
- *Federal Student Aid Handbook: Application and Verification Guide*, Chapter 2, pp 21-28 in 2011–12 edition (available at www.ifap.ed.gov)
- *The Counselors and Mentors Handbook on Federal Student Aid*, Parts 2 and 3 (www.fsa4counselors.ed.gov)
- "Am I Dependent or Independent" fact sheet (www.studentaid.ed.gov/resources)

- “Who Is My ‘Parent’ When I Fill Out the FAFSA?” fact sheet (www.studentaid.ed.gov/pubs)
- Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, Section 480(d)(7)
- Dear Colleague Letter GEN-08-12, pp. 79 to 80 (www.ifap.ed.gov)

Student Dependency Status

SLIDE 1



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SLIDE 2

Student Dependency Status

Slide 2
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Student Dependency Status

- In this module, we'll talk about what makes a student dependent or independent for filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA.
- The federal student aid programs are based on the principle that paying for college is the family's responsibility. If a student is considered dependent on his or her parent(s), he or she must include parental information on the FAFSA so that the financial strength of the family can be determined.
- If a student is independent, only the student's information (and that of his or her spouse, if the student is married) is reported on the FAFSA.
- The independent status criteria are in the law; a student cannot "declare" himself or herself independent.
- The FAFSA asks several questions that determine dependency status. Let's go through them, and along the way I'll point out the criteria that are relatively new.
- We have provided a fact sheet called *Am I Dependent or Independent?* Copy it and give it to students who are unsure about their status. Follow along on the fact sheet as we go through the questions.

SLIDE 3

What Makes a Student Independent?

- Born before 1/1/90 (for 2013–14 year)
- Married
- Graduate or professional student

Slide 3

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What Makes a Student Independent?

Note to Instructor: In the PowerPoint, we have shortened the questions for the sake of fitting them on the slides; the full questions are included in the “Am I Dependent or Independent?” fact sheet as well as below.

Dependency status questions:

- Were you born before January 1, 1990?
- As of today, are you married?
- At the beginning of the 2013–14 school year, will you be working on a master’s or doctorate program (such as an MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, EdD, graduate certificate, etc.)?

If you’ve been working with students on filling out FAFSAs for a while now, these questions will look very familiar.

SLIDE 4

What Makes a Student Independent?

- Active duty military for purposes other than training
- Veteran

Slide 4

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What Makes a Student Independent?

Dependency status questions:

- Are you currently serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces for purposes other than training?
- Are you a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces?

SLIDE 5

What Makes a Student Independent?

- Children
- Dependents other than children or spouse

Slide 5

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What Makes a Student Independent?

Dependency status questions:

- Do you have children who will receive more than half of their support from you between July 1, 2013 and June 30, 2014?
- Do you have dependents (other than your children or spouse) who live with you and who receive more than half of their support from you, now and through June 30, 2014?

SLIDE 6

What Makes a Student Independent?

- Orphan, foster care, dependent/ward of the court
- Emancipated minor
- Legal guardianship

Slide 6
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What Makes a Student Independent?

Dependency status questions:

- At any time since you turned age 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care, or were you a dependent or ward of the court?
- Are you or were you an emancipated minor as determined by a court in your state of legal residence?
- Are you or were you in legal guardianship as determined by a court in your state of legal residence?

These questions are a combination of older and newer criteria.

- Foster care:
 - Applicant qualifies if he or she was in foster care at any time since turning 13.
- Emancipated minor and legal guardianship:
 - The court order must be in effect on the date the student signs the FAFSA, or must have been in effect immediately prior to the student becoming an adult.
 - “Adult” is defined by each state.
 - Court order must be issued in the student’s state of legal residence.

SLIDE 7

What Makes a Student Independent?

- Homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
 - As determined by agency specified in FAFSA instructions
 - Or by financial aid administrator

Slide 7
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What Makes a Student Independent?

Dependency status questions:

- At any time on or after July 1, 2012, did your high school or school district homeless liaison determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless?
- At any time on or after July 1, 2012, did the director of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by

the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless?

- At any time on or after July 1, 2012, did the director of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?
- The FAFSA instructions contain definitions for the terms “homeless,” “unaccompanied,” and “youth.” Applicants should read the instructions carefully if they think these criteria might apply to them.
- If a student does not have a determination from one of the officials specified in these questions, but believes he or she is an unaccompanied youth who is homeless or at risk of being homeless, the student should first contact his or her school liaison or the appropriate program director to see if a determination was made. If a determination was not made, the student should contact the financial aid office at the school he or she plans to attend.

SLIDE 8

Dependency Overrides

- Financial Aid Administrators have authority to change the filing status from dependent independent
- Student must present documentation of situation

Slide 8

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Dependency Overrides

An FAA has the authority to make an otherwise dependent student independent if he or she believes the student’s situation warrants an override. The student must show that he or she is in an unusual situation, referred to as “special circumstances.” The FAA makes decisions on case-by-case basis with adequate documentation.

SLIDE 9

Dependency Overrides

Here are examples of special circumstances that might warrant a

Dependency Overrides

- Special circumstances:
 - Abuse at home
 - Abandonment by parents
- NOT special circumstances:
 - Parents don't claim student on taxes
 - Student does not live with parents and supports self
 - Parents don't want to help pay for college
 - Parents refuse to provide information for FAFSA

Slide 9

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SLIDE 10

Dependency Overrides

Documentation from third party:

- Teacher
- Social worker
- Member of clergy
- Court
- Law enforcement

Slide 10

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SLIDE 11

Completion of FAFSA Without Parental Information

Slide 11

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SLIDE 12

No Access to Parental Information

- FOTW asks whether student will provide parental data
- If no, student indicates he or she meets special circumstances criteria
- Student can submit FAFSA without parent information
- FAFSA will have reject code
 - Student needs to work with school to complete application

Slide 12

NT4CM 2013-14

dependency override.

It's important to understand that a student can't just move out of the house and become independent. The U.S. Department of Education, or ED, has also stated that certain situations, by themselves or in combination, do not qualify a student for a dependency override.

Dependency Overrides

Documentation from a Third Party

- FAA will ask student for documentation to support his or her claim of special circumstances. The documentation requested might take the form of a written statement from a third party who knows the situation.
- FAA's decision is final and cannot be appealed to ED.

Completion of FAFSA Without Parental Information

- Sometimes a dependent student is unable to provide his or her parents' information on the FAFSA, because the parents refuse to complete the application, or because the student is no longer in touch with his or her parents.
- Let's talk about some scenarios that might come up, and what the student should do.

No Access to Parental Information

- FAFSA on the Web, or FOTW, allows the student to indicate whether he or she meets criteria such as having left home due to abuse.
- FOTW also allows certain homeless applicants to follow a similar process.

SLIDE 13

Parents Refuse to Provide Information

- Student indicates situation on FOTW, choosing option that he or she is applying only for an unsubsidized loan
- Student submits FAFSA without parental information
- EFC not calculated
- Student must contact school regarding documentation and decision

Slide 13
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- Those who are 22 or 23, and thus don't count as "homeless youth" but don't meet any criteria to be independent for FAFSA purposes.
- FAFSA is processed but no EFC is calculated.
- Student needs to contact the financial aid office.
 - Will request additional information regarding his or her situation in order to determine whether a dependency override is appropriate.

Parents Refuse to Complete FAFSA

- Feature of FOTW:
 - Process is available for students who wish to apply for an unsubsidized Stafford Loan because parents are not supporting them and are refusing to complete the FAFSA.
- Appropriate for students:
 - Who do not qualify for a dependency override;
 - Whose parents have stopped providing financial support;
 - Whose parents will not support the student during college; and
 - Whose parents refuse to provide information on the FAFSA.
- Financial aid administrator at school may use professional judgment to award only an unsubsidized Stafford Loan.
- Documentation:
 - Parents need to submit a signed and dated statement stating the they have stopped supporting the student, will not support the student in the future, and refuse to provide information for the FAFSA.

SLIDE 14

Who Qualifies as a Parent for a Dependent Student?

Slide 14

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SLIDE 15

Who Is a Parent?

- Biological parents
- Adoptive parents
- Stepparents, if they are married to the student's biological or adoptive parent and the student is included in their household size

Slide 15

NT4CM 2013 -14

SLIDE 16

Who Is NOT a Parent?

- Foster parents
- Legal guardians who have not adopted the student
- Relatives who have not adopted the student
- Stepparents who have not adopted the student and who would be the only person providing parental information

Slide 16

NT4CM 2013 -14

- If the parents refuse to provide the statement, the financial aid office must obtain documentation from a third party, such as a teacher, counselor, clergy, or court describing the student's relationship with his or her parents.
- It is not enough for the student to state that this is the situation; documentation must come from the parent or third party.

Who Counts as a Parent for a Dependent Student?

Although a student may live with and receive support from any adult, only certain individuals count as a parent for FAFSA purposes.

The following count as parents:

- Biological parents;
- Adoptive parents; and
- Stepparents, if they are married to the student's biological or adoptive parent and the student is included in their household size.

The following individuals would never be considered the student's parent for FAFSA purposes:

- Foster parents;
- Legal guardians who have not adopted the student;
- Relatives, such as grandparents, who have not adopted the student; and
- Stepparents who have not adopted the student and who would be the only person providing parental information.

Note to Instructor: Refer trainees to "Who Is My 'Parent'" fact sheet so they can find the answers to the case study questions.

If you are working with a lot of counselors who are new to the FAFSA, you might want to briefly go through the fact sheet first. Otherwise, just dive in with the questions and let them raise their hands to answer. Make sure everyone understands WHY each answer is correct (point them to the appropriate spot on the fact sheet, and discuss further if necessary).

SLIDE 17

Case Study: Lisa

1. Lisa's parents are divorced. She lives with mom and only stays with dad a few weeks during the summer.
2. Lisa's dad makes more money than her mom.
3. Lisa now lives half time with dad, half time with mom.

Slide 17
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Case Study: Lisa (Divorced Parents)

➔ *Read the text of each numbered scenario, and then discuss the answer to that question before moving on to the next one.*

1. (Q) Lisa's parents are divorced and she lives with her mom and only stays with her dad for a few weeks during the summer. Whose information is put into the parent sections of the FAFSA?

(A) Mom's info – Lisa lives most of the time with Mom.

2. (Q) Lisa's dad makes quite a bit more money than her mom does – does that mean she should put his information on the FAFSA instead of her mom's?

(A) No – because Lisa lives with Mom more than with Dad.

3. (Q) Lisa's custody situation changes; she now lives exactly half the year with her mom and half with her dad. Whose information goes on her FAFSA?

(A) It is likely that dad provides more financial support for Lisa than mom does, since he makes more. But this one can be debated. It really comes down to Lisa analyzing her situation to determine which parent provides more support.

SLIDE 18

Case Study: Lisa (Divorced Parents) (cont'd)

4. (Q) Lisa's mom remarries. Does Lisa include her stepfather's

Case Study: Lisa

4. Lisa's mom remarries. Does stepdad's information go on her FAFSA?
5. Lisa's stepdad has his own kids. Should Lisa's leave his information off her FAFSA?

Slide 18
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information on the FAFSA?

(A) Yes – the FAFSA is a snapshot of the family's financial strength at the time the FAFSA is filed – not just the student's biological parent. Lisa's stepfather is part of the family, so Lisa must include his information on her application.

5. (Q) Lisa's stepfather has kids of his own to help through college, and he has told her he won't be able to help with her expenses. Does that mean Lisa should leave his information off her FAFSA?

(A) No – but if the stepfather's children will live with him and Lisa's mom, they will be included in their household size, which will impact the amount of Lisa's financial need.

SLIDE 19

Case Study: Shawn

1. Shawn's mom passed away, and he doesn't get along with dad. Shawn lives with his older sister and her husband.
2. Shawn's dad is now incarcerated. Should Shawn take a paper FAFSA on a visit for information and a signature?

Slide 19
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Case Study: Shawn (Other Parental Figures)

➔ *As with Lisa's numbered scenarios, read a scenario, discuss it, and then move on to the next numbered item.*

1. (Q) Shawn's mom passed away several years ago, and he doesn't get along with his dad. So he moved out of his dad's house and lives across town with his older sister and her husband. Should Shawn list his sister's information on his FAFSA as parental data?

(A) No; Shawn's sister is not his parent unless she adopts him.

2. (Q) Shawn's dad is now incarcerated. Is his dad's information required on the FAFSA?

(A) Shawn's dad is his parent, and therefore his information is required on the FAFSA unless Shawn's FAA performs a dependency override. Shawn can indicate on the FAFSA that he has a special circumstance, as we discussed earlier, and he will not be required to provide his dad's information in order to submit his initial application. However, the FAFSA will not be complete until Shawn's FAA determines whether to perform

SLIDE 20

Case Study: Carlos

1. Carlos lives with his grandmother to take pressure off his mom.
2. Carlos' grandmother has been named his legal guardian.

Slide 20

NT4CM 2013 -14

SLIDE 21

Questions



Slide 21

NT4CM 2013 -14

SLIDE 22



a dependency override. If the FAA performs an override, Shawn's FAFSA will be processed without his dad's information. If the FAA decides the override is not appropriate, Shawn will need to get his dad's information and signature.

Case Study: Carlos (Other Parental Figures)

1. (Q) Carlos' mom is busy with his three younger siblings, so Carlos lives with his grandmother to take the pressure off his mom. Is Carlos' grandmother a parent for FAFSA purposes?
(A) No; Carlos's grandmother is not his parent unless she has adopted him. If she hasn't, then Carlos needs to use his mom's information.
2. (Q) Carlos's grandmother has now been declared his legal guardian by a court in his state of legal residence. Should she provide her information on Carlos' FAFSA?
(A) Because Carlos is in a legal guardianship as declared by a court in his state of residence, he is now independent and doesn't have to report either his grandmother's or his mother's information.

Wrap Up

Ask for any additional questions and wrap up the session.